



**DECISION NOTICE for the Draft Environmental Assessment:  
Elk Island WMA Agricultural Lease  
Region 7 Headquarters  
PO Box 1630, Miles City, MT 59301  
(406) 234-0900**

**DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION:**

Elk Island WMA was purchased by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) to maintain a woodland/cropland complex to benefit a diversity of wildlife while maximizing hunting opportunities, primarily for white-tailed deer and pheasants. The proposed action is to initiate a share-crop agreement on 36.5 ac of the WMA that was purchased and added to the WMA in 2014. The lessee will cultivate and retain a portion of the hay/grain crop harvest, leaving the remaining crop standing for wildlife use during winter months.

The benefit and purpose of the lease is to provide winter habitat and forage, primarily for pheasants, deer, and turkeys. Standing crops also benefit migrating waterfowl and a variety of other wildlife species. The area is open to public hunting during all commission-approved seasons, and provides opportunity for deer, upland game bird, and waterfowl hunting.

**ALTERNATIVE TO PROPOSED ACTION:**

**Alternative A: No Action:**

Agricultural lease will not be initiated and agricultural lands will not be cultivated. This alternative would require MFWP to commit resources to manage weeds on the previously cultivated 36.5 acres of farm fields. Wildlife would be negatively impacted by lack of wintering habitat and forage resources.

**Alternative B: Proposed Action:** Agricultural lease will be initiated for 36.5 ac of cropland. Wildlife will benefit because high-quality wintering habitat and forage will be available. The lessee, MFWP and sportsmen will mutually benefit through the sharecrop agreement.

**PUBLIC REVIEW PROCESS:**

FWP is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess potential impacts of its proposed actions to the human and physical environments, evaluate those impacts through an interdisciplinary approach, including public input, and make a decision based on this information. FWP released a draft environmental assessment (EA) for public review of this

proposal (Elk Island Wildlife Management Area Agricultural Lease) on January 21, 2015 and accepted public comment until 5:00 P. M. on February 11, 2014.

Legal notice of the proposal and availability of the Draft EA was published in the *Glendive Ranger Review* and the *Sidney Herald*. Copies of the environmental assessment were distributed to neighboring landowners and interested individuals, groups, and agencies to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project. The EA was available for public review on FWP's web site (<http://fwp.mt.gov/>, "Recent Public Notices" and "Submit Public Comments"). An FWP statewide news release was issued and posted on FWP's website (<http://fwp.mt.gov/>, "News Releases").

#### SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENT

FWP received no comments regarding the lease.

#### RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENT

FWP received no comments regarding the lease.

#### DECISION NOTICE

Utilizing the EA and public comment, a decision must be rendered by FWP which addresses the concerns and issues identified for this proposed action.

FWP's analysis supports the agricultural lease of Elk Island WMA as proposed. I find there to be no significant impacts on the human and physical environments associated with this project. Therefore, I conclude that the Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis, and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

**After review of this proposal, it is my decision to accept the draft EA as supplemented by this Decision Notice as final, and to recommend the implementation of the agricultural lease for Elk Island WMA.**

The Final EA may be viewed on FWP's Internet website: <http://www.fwp.mt.gov> or be obtained upon request from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Region 7 Headquarters, P.O. Box 1630, Miles City, Mt. 59301 (406) 234-0900.



---

Brad Schmitz  
R-7 Regional Supervisor

February 12, 2015

Date